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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SANT EGIDIO ASSEMBLES AFRICAN JUSTICE MINISTERS

REF: A) VATICAN 447; B) VATICAN 484; C) VATICAN 490; D) VATICAN 523; E) 04 VATICAN 4205

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The Rome-based Sant'Egidio Community brought together justice ministers from several African states in November to consider their respective governments' positions on the death penalty and other issues involving their penal systems. Sant'Egidio's Mario Giro told us that the participation of many Muslims in the event was significant. He told us that if Morocco eventually removes the death penalty from its books, it would be the first predominantly Islamic country to do so. The Community's ability to attract top African ministers highlights its continued clout in the continent. End Summary.

SANT'EGIDIO'S CLOUT BRINGS MINISTERS TOGETHER

2. (U) The Rome-based Sant'Egidio Community brought together justice ministers and other representatives from several African states to consider their respective governments' positions on the death penalty and explore issues involving their penal systems November 28-29. The meeting involved ministers and deputy ministers of justice from a dozen countries, including Mozambique, Morocco, Liberia, Senegal, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, and Malawi.

MINISTERIAL CHANGE OF HEART OVER DEATH PENALTY

3. (SBU) Liberia's Kabineh Janeh appealed to Sant'Egidio and the international community for assistance in re-writing his country's constitution to reflect the rejection of the death penalty and a renewed emphasis on the value of human life. Janeh, a Muslim, used to favor the death penalty but has since changed sides on the issue. Sant'Egidio's Mario Giro told us that the participation of many Muslims in the event was significant. He noted that if Morocco eventually removes the death penalty from its books, it would be the first predominantly Islamic country to do so. Participants also discussed prison conditions and issues involving prisoner rehabilitation.

COMMENT

4. (U) Giro told us he was very pleased with the strong turnout for the event and said a follow-up meeting somewhere in Africa was possible, as was another conference on the same subject in Rome next year. The Community's ability to attract top African ministers highlights its continued clout in the continent; in addition to this issue Sant'Egidio is active in conflict resolution in several areas in Africa (e.g., Sudan, Togo, Great Lakes) and is currently expanding its successful HIV/AIDS anti-retroviral DREAM project to additional African countries (reftels). Although the Community has also been active in China, the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere, its greatest expertise still rests in Africa, where local membership has been key to its success. End comment.
ROONEY

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